

EVENTS CALENDAR

ROBIN BROOKS



Reactors, Russia-Centrism, and U.S. Relations with Eastern Europe

Tuesday, April 05, 2016, 3:00PM - 4:30PM

Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Avenue | Room 120 Columbus, Ohio 43201

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This event is sponsored by the Center for Slavic and East European Studies at The Ohio State University.

Robin S. Brooks is Davis Fellow at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University for 2015-16. A Foreign Service officer with the State Department since 2004, Brooks has served as human dimension officer at the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, refugee resettlement officer at the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, and chief of staff to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. She has also worked in the State Department Operations Center and at the U.S. embassies in Moscow and Sofia.

Before joining the Foreign Service, Brooks completed a Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, and taught in the Department of International Relations and Security at Sofia University in Bulgaria, while also volunteering at the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, an NGO focused on promoting and protecting human rights.

Abstract

This lecture will discuss how, by prioritizing competition with Russia over bilateral relations with Eastern European countries, the United States damaged both its own national interests and those of its Eastern European partners.

It engages the academic and policy debates over the desirability of resurrecting (or maintaining) the Cold War system of "spheres of interest" to preserve stability and contain potential expansion by one or the other side. It argues that reliance on "spheres of interest" may undermine, rather than support, U.S. national interests.

The main case study for the discussion is U.S. support for European energy security and independence. Specifically, Brooks examines advocacy on behalf of Westinghouse's bid to build nuclear power plants in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, and lobbying to prevent construction of Russia's South Stream gas pipeline. Brooks will argue that these activities were not able to help achieve energy security or independence for the countries in question or for Europe, largely because they were based precisely on competition with Russia, rather than on U.S. or host country interests.

Turning in detail to Bulgaria, Brooks will then assert that rather than sparking transparent debate and fact-based decisions about energy needs and the likely results of various possible paths to energy diversification, the potential availability of a Westinghouse reactor provided Bulgaria's government with an easy excuse to play a game of tit-for-tat between American and Russian projects.

This bolstered anti-U.S. media and corrupt politicians (both of which have ties to Russia and to organized crime), undermined the rule of law, and alienated and disempowered the previously pro-U.S. middle class and student protest movement. Moreover, the apparent prioritization of any project that directly competed with a Russian one over numerous other Western commercial ventures in Bulgaria – including in the energy sphere – created space for corrupt local businesses with Russia ties to flourish.

Finally, this situation also circumscribed possibilities for cooperation that would have helped develop Bulgaria as a reliable partner to the United States on security issues, including combating transnational organized crime and terrorism.



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